THE 826 NETWORK’S GOAL IS TO ENCOURAGE THE EXPLORATION OF ENDLESS POSSIBILITY THROUGH THE POWER OF WRITING
WELCOME, READERS, TO THE YEAR 2020!

The 826 Network is now 18 years old, and like our very first students, we’re hurtling toward our adulthood. We’ve made some significant accomplishments over the past three years, including:

- 826 is now a collection of ten strong and vibrant chapters across the United States; as well as a thriving digital presence for educators. Each year, the 826 Network serves 75,000 students;
- We are comprised of an energized, supported, and diverse staff and volunteer corps that have clear pathways to grow their talents as they develop as leaders within the organization;
- We champion a network-wide culture of data-driven and community-based decision making; and
- 826 is known as an important advocate for effective writing practices within the nation’s education community and is a much sought-after expert.

Follow along as we trace backward through the FY 2018-20 strategic plan that led us to these achievements. Hindsight is 20/20!
“In the year 2020, I would like to be a successful business owner, a PROUD Alpha Kappa Alpha sister, and also a therapist. By this time I would like to accomplish so much I don’t know where to begin.”

— Ashan’ti B., age 16, student at 826michigan
826michigan’s 2020: Visions of the [Near] Future
WHERE WE’VE COME FROM

In 2002, our network’s founding chapter, 826 Valencia, opened its doors with a modest plan to support local students with individualized writing, tutoring, and homework help. Since then, 826’s reach has grown exponentially.

During the 2016-17 school year, the 826 Network served 32,350 students and 1,035 teachers. In addition, our chapters offered 568 free writing workshops, 1,549 free after-school tutoring sessions, 240 free in-school writing projects, 676 free field trips, and published 898 student publications that celebrated our students’ dreams, imaginations, and hopes for the future.

Looking back at 826 National’s FY 2014-16 strategic plan, we agreed to focus on the following strategic priorities, and made significant progress in each area:

**Research & Evaluation:** In partnership with our chapters, we conducted research and evaluation to support ongoing learning and to ensure quality standards. We investigated key programming, such as the Young Authors’ Book Project and After-School Tutoring. We learned, for example, that 86% of students in one of our signature creative writing programs reported feeling an increase in their confidence about writing.

**Brand, Marketing & Advocacy:** 826 National became increasingly visible in the media and within the education community increasing awareness of our work. We presented *STEM to Story* on the mainstage of the Clinton Global Initiative America, *CBS This Morning* aired a national profile on our work, and we refreshed our external messaging, which inspired the “Write Your Own Path Forward” tag.

**Fundraising:** 826 National’s revenue has grown by 58% since FY 2013, in support of an operating budget that has grown by 43%. And, for the first time, we were able to raise funds on behalf of our chapters, directing an average of 20% of our revenue as cash grants to chapters.

**Internal & External Growth:** From FY 2013 to 2017, the 826 Network staff increased by 40% and five new satellites and centers opened to serve more local students. In response to growing chapter needs, the National office took the lead on a significant diversity, equity, and inclusion initiative; provided increased professional development and knowledge-sharing opportunities for network staff; and created a new chapter affiliation agreement.

We’ve made excellent progress, but there is more work to do...
WHY 826 MATTERS TODAY

The end goal of this plan is to serve more students.

At 826, we believe that every student has the potential to succeed with the right opportunities and support. This is why we’ve chosen to serve students and communities who are under-represented, under-resourced, and under-heard. Of the students who attend our after-school tutoring program, 47% identify as Hispanic/Latino(a), 26% as African-American, 8% as Asian, 4% as White, and 6% as Multiracial. In addition, 40% of After-School Tutoring students identify a language other than English as their first language. Our chapters also prioritize school partners where 51% or more of the students qualify for free or reduced price lunches. Most partner schools far exceed this requirement.

From civic leaders to the private sector, our country is in need of strong communicators and creative, diverse thinkers. The data continually shows that our nation’s students—particularly students of color—are not graduating with the necessary writing and creative-thinking skills that lead to academic and professional success.

826 helps students become better writers. 83% of After-School Tutoring students say 826 has helped them become a better writer, and their parents agree (89%). Beyond the academic and professional benefits, writing also unlocks opportunities for students to think more creatively, discover new ways to express themselves, and explore identity through storytelling. Simply put, writing inspires creativity, action, agency, and power.

Due to the success of 826 programming, demand for our programs far outweighs capacity. All of our existing chapters are outgrowing their original locations, and many have lengthy waitlists for programs. At the National office, we receive three to five inquiries every week from individuals and groups who have questions about our work, or who would like to start an 826 in their community. Thirty-three domestic organizations have been directly inspired by the 826 model, and there are twenty 826-inspired international organizations in cities such as London, Sydney, and Buenos Aires.

To help us meet the increased need for our services, 826 National has embarked upon the next phase of network expansion. This FY 2018-20 strategic plan is a blueprint for the growth that will be necessary to address that demand.
A WORD ABOUT FUNDRAISING

826 National’s contributors are true partners in our work, providing us with the essential resources and expertise that make it possible for us to encourage and inspire more young writers. To achieve our 2020 vision, we will seek out influential allies and advocates from a diverse range of new sectors, regions, and backgrounds, and expand our community of sustaining and multi-year supporters at all levels. There is a part for everyone to play in bringing this plan to life, and we are incredibly grateful to the generous supporters who have already invested in the 826 Network.

THANKS
OUR 2020 VISION

The vision and strategies represented in this document are influenced by the strategic plans of our current chapters, and we are grateful to the 826 National board, chapter executive directors, and stakeholders who helped us to envision and refine this plan.

Priority #1
DEVELOP OUR TALENT

Priority #2
TRACK & EVALUATE OUR IMPACT

Priority #3
SUSTAINABLY SCALE THE 826 APPROACH

Priority #4
STRENGTHEN COMMUNICATIONS & OUTREACH
**Priority #1**
**DEVELOP OUR TALENT**

826 National will increase professional development for staff, volunteers, and boards at all levels of experience across the network to increase staff retention; build strong, effective boards; and develop new leaders to ensure network sustainability.

**WHAT WE PLAN TO DO**

Develop leaders on our staff to ensure network sustainability and improve staff retention rates.

As volunteers are at the heart of 826, and essential to providing high-quality, engaging services to students, we will develop a suite of professional development tools and resources to expand a robust, diverse, enthusiastic, and prepared volunteer program to support our students in the best way possible.

Continue to integrate, support, and evaluate our diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practices and policies to ensure progress toward a more inclusive 826 Network.

Move toward a more diverse, participatory, collaborative, collegial, active board able to connect us—and our chapters—to resources. Our board will effectively propel the 826 Network toward long-term sustainability and keep pace with the growth of the network.

During FY 2019-20, 826 National will work with chapters to create an active alumni program that connects students to paid internships, volunteer assignments, and opportunities as 826 Network ambassadors.

**HOW WE PLAN TO DO IT**

- In FY 2018-19, hire a new staff member to focus on human resources and talent development.
- Integrate core competencies into staff hiring and performance evaluation practices by FY 2018-19.
- Create a formal alumni program, potentially led by a new hire at the National office, by FY 2019-20.
- Host one to two network-wide professional development trainings annually.
- Recruit new board members using National’s DEI framework and provide continuing training and development on board roles and responsibilities.
Priority #2
TRACK & EVALUATE IMPACT

Since 826 National’s founding, better evaluating the impact of our programs has been a major focus of our work. We will continue to foster this culture of evaluation by creating systems to track student gains and outcomes in academic skills and social-emotional learning so that we may inform future program development with data-driven, community-based decisions, and effectively share our work and best practices with the field.

WHAT WE PLAN TO DO

Implement a new writing assessment, designed in conjunction with the National Writing Project, that will provide an objective measurement of academic skill development and enable us to measure academic gains over time.

Develop a system for tracking unique students and unique student hours to gain a more accurate picture of the impact that increased time with 826 has on student learning.

Continue to build a culture of evaluation throughout the 826 Network by empowering chapters to use data as a tool for program modifications and development, and to advance the understanding of the network’s collective impact.

Expand and refine the collection of assessment options in response to the diverse 826 Network student population (e.g., language, age) and the full scope of student gains, including social-emotional gains such as confidence, self-efficacy, and more.

Partner with an external evaluator to help us learn about programming that has not yet been investigated (e.g., 826 Digital).

HOW WE PLAN TO DO IT

• By FY 2017-18, pilot a new, more rigorous writing assessment at all chapters.
• In FY 2017-18, initiate the process of tracking student data through our network-wide database.
• By FY 2018-19, conduct a new, independent external program evaluation.
• By FY 2019, translate all surveys into multiple languages.
• By FY 2019-20, hire an evaluation consultant to help us develop metrics for surveying 6-8 year olds.
**Priority #3**

**Sustainably Scale the 826 Approach**

Given the increasing demand for 826 Network services, the National office will build upon current strategies to move toward a more proactive model of expansion, bringing 826’s unique approach to teaching writing to communities across the country. As we expand into new locations and program areas, we do so keeping in mind our commitment to growing and sustaining our existing programs and locations.

**What We Plan To Do**

- **Inspire 75,000 students** annually with the 826 model.
- **Support chapters** as they expand within their own geographic areas.
- **Lead and strengthen the international movement of 826-inspired organizations** by facilitating and formalizing opportunities and communities for shared learning.
- **Increase distribution of educator resources through 826 Digital**, our new online platform, and publish new collections of 826 writing curriculum, including a new volume of *Don’t Forget to Write* and a new coding monograph for *STEM to Story*.

To keep pace with our national growth, **assess our volunteer model** and consider new strategies (e.g., paid internships, increased AmeriCorps service members, and teaching artists) to sustain individualized service to students.

**How We Plan To Do It**

- Reach 1,000 registered users with 826 Digital during the launch year.
- Open three new chapters between FY 2018-20.
- In FY 2017-18, explore strategies to recruit more volunteers and/or explore new, sustainable models to continue a tradition of individualized student support.
- In FY 2018-19, establish an international 826 Network-affiliation agreement and process.
- By FY 2019-20, identify five new organizations for the chapter development pipeline.
Priority #4  
STRENGTHEN COMMUNICATIONS & OUTREACH

826 National will strengthen our external messaging and branding in order to communicate with the education community and civic leaders about writing as a tool for academic and lifelong success. Our signature creative approach and playful voice are integral to our brand, and making that voice heard nationwide is key to effectively building awareness about the importance of writing.

**WHAT WE PLAN TO DO**

**Position the 826 Network as a thought-leader** in the national education community.

**Enhance internal communications within the 826 Network**, facilitating an exchange of feedback and providing opportunities for reflection and improvement.

**Work in collaboration with local chapters** to amplify and unify external communications and messaging across the 826 Network to celebrate the importance of writing.

**Reach new audiences from diverse communities** to build awareness about and engagement with 826.

**Leverage public relations and communications plans** to support expansion of the 826 Network (e.g., launch an 826 awareness building campaign in a prospective chapter city).

**HOW WE PLAN TO DO IT**

- By FY 2017-18, hire a full-time marketing and communications role at the National office.

- Position 826 Network representatives to speak at three to four major domestic education conferences annually and at least one international conference over the next three years.

- Build one to two marketing tools and/or campaigns every year to deliver messaging to diverse communities.
We believe in the power of young voices, the possibility in their ideas, and the value of their words.

We believe writing is a catalyst, it unlocks doors, builds confidence, and facilitates self-expression.

We honor diversity, equity, and inclusion and work to ensure that everyone is respected, included, and heard.

We nurture creative expression and foster a lifelong love of learning.

We are exponentially stronger through collective engagement, which allows us to create, implement, and sustain responsive programs.